



FORMATION FOR THE DIACONATE

IN THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF CONNECTICUT

**Serving God's Mission in  
the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

*09/2013*

# The Diaconate in Connecticut

*A vision for formation for the 21st century*

The ministry of a deacon plays a vital and significant role in our desire to live into God's mission. A deacon is a bridge between the church and the world - bringing the concerns of the world to those in our pews and encouraging and helping parishioners join God's mission more boldly in the world. Some deacons are passionate about addressing the needs of the marginalized; others are called to help parishes connect with social service agencies and other churches to serve the needs of the local community. All deacons are called to work with their bishop to proclaim the gospel and encourage others for service and ministry.

Our goal in the diocese of Connecticut is to raise up individuals and provide exceptional formational experiences that will be both solid and flexible to fit our busy lives. With a diversity of options for academic learning, we hope to appeal to a diverse range of Christians seeking to serve the Lord as a deacon. These options are sketched out in this brochure.

What follows is an outline of the deacon formation process in Connecticut. It is diverse, flexible and asks you to take a significant role in pursuing this call. We are excited and hopeful about these offerings, and we are excited that you are considering this wonderful, challenging and life affirming ministry!

## **How to begin the discernment process if you believe you might be called to serve the Lord as a Deacon:**

If you feel that God may be calling you to be a deacon, there are support systems within your parish and the diocese that want to encourage you to explore that call.

Your first step is to discuss this call with your rector or priest-in-charge. They can offer you guidance and wisdom about the life of a deacon, and may offer some suggested reading or invite you to speak with other deacons in Connecticut.

If you and your priest think this call may be worth exploring, you are both invited to make an appointment with the bishop overseeing the diaconate to discuss this call. At this point, the bishop may assign you a deacon mentor to walk with you in this journey and to share with you more of what it means to be a deacon. This mentor may walk with you (and your family) for the entire ordination process.

If the bishop thinks there may be a call to the diaconate, a yearlong process of discernment with your parish and the diocese begins. This process is outlined in detail in the Diaconal Discernment Manual found on the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut's website at: [www.ctepiscopal.org/images/customerfiles//DiaconateDiscernmentManual.pdf](http://www.ctepiscopal.org/images/customerfiles//DiaconateDiscernmentManual.pdf).

A quick overview of this journey: The bishop will invite your priest to put together a discernment group which allows you and the parish to listen and discern your call together. After the discernment committee completes its work, all of the paperwork outlined in the Discernment Manual is sent to the bishop's office for review. This paper work includes the recommendation from your discernment group, your rector and the vestry of your home parish. This paperwork also includes a medical examination by your personal physician and a psychological evaluation by the Diocesan consulting psychologist. The cost for the later will be borne by you, your parish and the bishops' office.

The bishop in consultation with others, will then make the decision as to whether you will be passed on to Commission on Ministry for an interview. This is a chance for leaders outside of your parish to work with you to listen for and learn of your call. These supportive conversations will help you discern if you are called to the diaconate or if another call (priesthood, lay chaplaincy or other ministry) may be a better fit.

This year of discernment is a significant time for you to learn about yourself and the diaconate. If together you and the Church discern that you should be made a postulant for the diaconate after this year of focused discernment, the bishop will invite you to meet with the Dean of Formation to outline the next steps in your journey. Postulant is the name given to persons who have been invited by the bishop to join the official ordination process.

## **What every Postulant can expect from the Diocese of Connecticut**

Those accepted as a postulant in Connecticut, will meet with the Dean of the Deacon Formation Program to explore the diverse academic offerings and learn more about formation. The entire deacon formation program lasts three years and will address the canonical requirements in which the Episcopal Church requires you to be competent. These areas are:

1. Academic studies including Holy Scripture, theology and the traditions of the church
2. An understanding of diakonia (the diaconate)
3. Human awareness and understanding
4. Spiritual development and discipline

Practical training and experience

You and the dean will determine which academic offering program might be the best course of study for you. We have outlined in this brochure three academic offerings for the educational component of your formation.

If you pursue a course of study outside of the three options, you will need to ensure that the courses you take will be from an accredited academic institution, and for those in a letter grade system, completion of these courses must be completed at a level of C or above. You may be assigned an academic mentor to review this work with you.

If the course does not issue a letter grade or have an examination as a part of its curriculum, the dean may ask you to write a paper to display proficiency at the end of the course.

Prior academic work may be acceptable if it addresses relevant topics and was completed in the ten years previous to being accepted as a postulant.

***In addition to the academic offerings, there will be requirements for formation within the Diocese of Connecticut***

1. You will be asked to find a spiritual director if you have not already done so in your formation.
2. If you do not yet have one, you will be assigned a deacon mentor who can guide you through some of the highlights, challenges and joys of serving as a deacon. This mentor may also serve as a support and source of information for your family.
3. Each fall you will be invited to a deacon formation retreat that will address certain themes such as VISIONS, Inc. training on multicultural awareness, community organizing and other important topics.
4. Five weekday evenings from September through June, for the three years you are in the ordination process, all of those in diaconal formation will meet with the dean for a time of check-in, prayer and personal sharing. This will be a time for local formation and community building.

After your first year of formation, you will be invited to meet with Commission on Ministry, which will review with you your formation thus far and explore what areas of ministry might be important for you to try on as your formation continues. With their recommendation, you will be invited to meet with the Standing Committee to apply for Candidacy, a second phase in the three year formation process. Candidate is a title indicating you have completed significant steps in your formation and that those who

oversee your formation are encouraging you to continue your journey toward ordination to the diaconate.

5. At some point in your formation you will be asked to do Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). Both summer and extended units of CPE are available in a variety of locations in and beyond Connecticut. The CPE program needs to be an accredited CPE program from the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc. For locations near you, please review the web site (<http://acpe.edu>). There is some cost associated with this program.
6. In the last year of your formation, you will be invited into an internship experience in another parish or social service organization.
7. Four times a year you are asked to write to the bishop to discuss your formation and any questions or thoughts you might have about your discernment. These letters are called Ember Day letters. You should also feel free to contact the bishop at any time throughout the process.
8. At some point prior to ordination you will need to complete the diocesan safe church training, title IV training and the anti-racism training. These are required by Episcopal Church canons.

## **The Academic Offerings**

### **Academic Option one: Joining the diaconal program in the Diocese of Massachusetts**

We have built a collaborative ministry with the Diocese of Massachusetts and their diaconal program. We encourage postulants and candidates to participate in this excellent process.

**Duration:** Three year program, meeting one weekend a month (Friday night - Sunday noon). September – May. Postulants and Candidates live in community during these weekends, sharing meals, worship and training

**Location:** St. Anne's Convent, Arlington, Massachusetts

**Format:** Friday night teaching from group participants, Saturday course work and fellowship time, Sunday Eucharist with liturgical opportunities and time for reflection and debriefing.

**Cost:** \$1,200 a year plus occasional costs for books or other resources

Highlights: This outstanding program offers time for academic study with local professors and clergy in New England and the formation of a collegial worshipping community other New England postulants and candidates.

### **Academic Option two: On line learning with the Church Divinity School of the Pacific (CDSP)**

Duration: online learning can be done at your own pace. Our expectation is for 12 courses which would typically take 3 years to complete. Courses are offered in the winter, spring, summer and fall.

Location: your home or a local church if you do not have access to the internet in your home.

Format: on line learning will include prerecorded lectures or course notes. Time for reading, written work and blogging with other course participants will be a significant part of this work. Lecturers respond to comments and blogs throughout the course.

Cost: roughly \$200 per course.

Highlights: CDSP's offering have been endorsed by the Association of Episcopal Deacons (AED) and offers core courses in the Center for Anglican Learning and Leadership (CALL) which include:

Theology, Ministry, History, Ethics, The Book of Common Prayer, The Holy Scriptures

CDSP has offerings such as:

The prophetic voice of the deacon, The deacon's path, The deacon's eyes and ears and The diaconate

Further information can be found at [http:// www.cdsp.edu](http://www.cdsp.edu)

### **Academic Option three: Diaconal Formation at General Seminary**

Duration: Typically, three years.

Location: online and in New York City at the campus of General Seminary

Format: Online, six Saturday seminars, three weeklong summer residencies.

Cost: \$2000 per year for full program (includes all costs below)  
\$1600 for summer residency only  
\$400 per course for only online course  
\$50 per Saturday program

Highlights: Canonical areas, Hospitality, Recovery Ministry, Diaconal Ministry, Interfaith relations, Storytelling, Family Systems and Social Justice

More information on General Seminary can be found here: <http://www.gts.edu/index.php>

Additional Resources and Bibliography are available

## ***Closing Thoughts***

Being called to be a deacon is a humbling and moving experience. It is a ministry that invites the world into the church and calls the church out into the world. It is a ministry that is challenging, hopeful, compassionate and encouraging of others. We hope that you have found this outline of the formation process helpful and an invitation to pray about whether this is a ministry God might be calling you to explore. For further information, please contact the Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens at [lahrens@ctdicoese.org](mailto:lahrens@ctdicoese.org).

